

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS Z"L**

### Covenant & Conversation

*Rabbi Sacks zt"l had prepared a full year of Covenant & Conversation for 5781, based on his book Lessons in Leadership. The Office of Rabbi Sacks will continue to distribute these weekly essays, so that people all around the world can keep on learning and finding inspiration in his Torah.*

**T**here is a lovely moment in this week's parsha that shows Moses at the height of his generosity as a leader. It comes after one of his deepest moments of despair. The people, as is their wont, have been complaining, this time about the food. They are tired of the manna. They want meat instead. Moses, appalled that they have not yet learned to accept the hardships of freedom, prays to die. "If this is how You are going to treat me," he says to God, "please go ahead and kill me right now -- if I have found favour in Your eyes -- and do not let me face my own ruin." (Num. 11:15)

God tells him to appoint seventy elders to help him with the burdens of leadership. He does so, and the Divine Spirit rests on them all. But it also rests on two other men, Eldad and Medad, who were not among the chosen seventy. Evidently Moses had selected six men out of each of the twelve tribes, making 72, and then removed Eldad and Medad by lot. Nonetheless, they too were caught up in the moment of inspiration. (Sanhedrin 17a)

Joshua, Moses' deputy, warns that this is a potential threat, but Moses replies with splendid magnanimity: "Are you jealous for my sake? I wish that all the Lord's people were Prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit upon each of them!" (Num. 11:29)

This contrasts sharply with Moses' conduct later when his leadership is challenged by Korach and his followers. On that occasion he showed no gentleness or generosity. To the contrary, in effect he prays that the ground swallow them up, that "they go down alive into the realm of the dead." (Num. 16:28-30) He is sharp, decisive and unforgiving. Why the different response to Korach on the one hand, and Eldad and Medad on the other?

To understand this, it is essential to grasp the difference between two concepts often confused, namely power and influence. We tend to think of them as similar if not identical. People of power have influence. People of influence have power. But the two

are quite distinct and operate by a different logic, as a simple thought experiment will show.

Imagine you have total power. Whatever you say, goes. Then one day you decide to share your power with nine others. You now have, at best, one-tenth of the power you had before. Now imagine instead that you have a certain measure of influence. You decide to share that influence with nine others, whom you make your partners. You now have ten times the influence you had before, because instead of just you there are now ten people delivering the message.

Power works by division, influence by multiplication. Power, in other words, is a zero-sum game: the more you share, the less you have. Influence is not like this, as we see with our Prophets. When it comes to leadership-as-influence, the more we share the more we have.

Throughout his forty years at the head of the nation, Moses held two different leadership roles. He was a Prophet, teaching Torah to the Israelites and communicating with God. He was also the functional equivalent of a king, leading the people on their journeys, directing their destiny and supplying them with their needs. The one leadership role he did not have was that of High Priest, which went to his brother Aaron.

We can see this duality later in the narrative when he inducts Joshua as his successor. God commands him: "Take Joshua son of Nun, a man of spirit, and lay your hand on him... Give him some of your honour (hod) so that the whole Israelite community will obey him." (Num. 27:18-20)

Note the two different acts. One, "lay your hand [vesamachta] on him," is the origin of term s'michah, whereby a Rabbi ordains a pupil, granting him the authority to make rulings in his own right. The Rabbis saw their role as a continuation of that of the Prophets ("Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua; Joshua to the elders; the elders to the Prophets; and the Prophets handed it down to the men of the Great Assembly," Mishnah Avot 1:1). By this act of s'michah, Moses was handing on to Joshua his role as Prophet.

By the other act, "Give him some of your honour," he was inducting him into the role of King. The Hebrew word hod, honour, is associated with kingship, as in the biblical phrase hod malchut, "the honour of kingship" (Dan. 11:21; 1 Chronicles, 29:25).

Kings had power -- including that of life and death (see Joshua 1:18). Prophets had none, but they had influence, not just during their lifetimes but, in many cases, to this day. To paraphrase Kierkegaard: when a King dies his power ends. When a Prophet dies his influence begins.

Now we see exactly why Moses' reaction was so different in the case of Eldad and Medad, and that of Korach and his followers. Eldad and Medad sought and received no power. They merely received the same influence -- the Divine Spirit that emanated from Moses. They became Prophets. That is why Moses said, "I wish that all the Lord's people were Prophets and that the Lord would put His Spirit on them."

Korach, or at least some of his followers, sought power, and power is a zero-sum game. When it comes to malchut, the leadership of power, the rule is: "There is one leader for the generation, not two." (Sanhedrin 8a) In kingship, a bid for power is an attempted coup d'etat and has to be resisted by force. Otherwise the result is a division of the nation into two, as happened after the death of King Solomon. Moses could not let the challenge of Korach go unchallenged without fatefully compromising his own authority.

So Judaism clearly demarcates between leadership as influence and leadership by power. It is unqualified in its endorsement of the first, and deeply ambivalent about the second. Tanach is a sustained polemic against the use of power. All power, according to the Torah, rightly belongs to God. The Torah recognises the need, in an imperfect world, for the use of coercive force in maintaining the rule of law and the defence of the realm. Hence its endorsement of the appointment of a King, should the people so desire it. (Deuteronomy 17:15-20; I Samuel 8) But this is clearly a concession, not an ideal. (So, at any rate, is the view of Ibn Ezra, Rabbeinu Bachya and Abarbanel.)

The real leadership embraced by Tanach and by rabbinic Judaism is that of influence, above all that of Prophets and teachers. As we have noted many times before, that is the ultimate accolade given to Moses by tradition. We know him as Moshe Rabbeinu, Moses our teacher. Moses was the first of a long line of figures in Jewish history -- among them Ezra, Hillel, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai, Rabbi Akiva, the Sages of the Talmud and the scholars of the Middle Ages -- who represent one of Judaism's most revolutionary ideas: the teacher as hero.

Judaism was the first and greatest civilisation to predicate its very survival on education, houses of study, and learning as a religious experience higher even than prayer. (Shabbat 10a) The reason is this: leaders are people able to mobilise others to act in certain ways. If they achieve this only because they hold power over them, this means treating people as means, not ends -- as things not persons. Not accidentally, the single greatest writer on leadership as

power was Machiavelli.

The other approach is to speak to people's needs and aspirations, and teach them how to achieve these things together as a group. That is done through the power of a vision, force of personality, the ability to articulate shared ideals in a language with which people can identify, and the capacity to "raise up many disciples" who will continue the work into the future. Power diminishes those on whom it is exercised. Influence and education lift and enlarge them.

Judaism is a sustained protest against what Hobbes called the "general inclination of all mankind," nameless "a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death." (The Leviathan, part 1, ch. 11) That may be the reason why Jews have seldom exercised power for prolonged periods of time but have had an influence on the world out of all proportion to their numbers.

Not all of us have power, but we all have influence. That is why we can each be leaders. The most important forms of leadership come not with position, title or robes of office, not with prestige and power, but with the willingness to work with others to achieve what we cannot do alone; to speak, to listen, to teach, to learn, to treat other people's views with respect even if they disagree with us, to explain patiently and cogently why we believe what we believe and why we do what we do; to encourage others, praise their best endeavours and challenge them to do better still.

Always choose influence rather than power. It helps change people into people who can change the world. *Covenant and Conversation 5781 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2021 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**T**he Jewish people seemed poised for entry into the Promised Land when suddenly the nation became a group of kvetchers, "complaining evilly in the ears of the Lord.... saying 'who will feed us meat? Remember the fish which we ate in Egypt for free, the cucumbers, the watermelons, the onions and the garlic'" (Numbers 11:1,4, 5)

The degeneration continues, Moses cries out to God that he has no meat to give the nation and that he can no longer bear the burden of leading them. The Divine response is to tell Moses to gather 70 men from among the elders of Israel who will help bear the burden and upon whom the spirit of the Lord will rest (11:16,17).

Why are the Jews so vexed and unsettled and how does God's response alleviate their feelings? They want meat and God tells Moses to give them 70 rabbis! After all of the miracles of the Exodus, it's difficult to

understand the disillusionment of the Israelites and even more difficult to understand the solution offered by God.

I believe that the subtext of this dialogue between the Israelites, Moses and God is that Moses is now being confronted by a new generation, by the youth who left Egypt and are now maturing into adulthood. This new generation has different needs and expectations than had their parents. Each generation requires its own teachers; each generation has its own dreams, needs and vision. The adults who left Egypt with Moses required a Rav; their children, who are now growing to maturity, require a Rebbe.

It has often been said that the difference between a Rav and a Rebbe is that when a Rav chastises, everyone thinks he is speaking to their neighbor, whereas when a Rebbe chastises everyone feels that he is speaking personally to them. I believe there is another difference which emanates from this one. A Rav speaks with the voice of tradition and conveys the words of God to the entire nation, giving a message which expresses the vision of our eternal Torah for all generations. A Rebbe speaks personally to every individual, taking the eternal message of God and making it relevant to their needs. The Rav speaks to the generation; the Rebbe speaks to the individual in each generation.

Moses was an exalted prophet who came to the Israelites from the faraway palace of Pharaoh. He continued to lead them from the Tent of the Divine Meeting three parasangs (about 10.5 miles) from the encampment of the Israelites. Moses did not speak to the Israelites with his own voice since "he was heavy of speech and of uncircumcised tongue". He thundered with the voice of God presenting the Divine message of freedom and responsibility. His power which emanated from the Divine enabled him to unite the nation and imbue them with the confidence to follow him and God into the barren desert. Moses came from the distance and looked out into the distance. He was a ro'eh (with an aleph); a lofty and majestic seer.

Now that the Jews had collectively left the land of oppression, followed their seer into the desert and were about to begin a new life in the Promised Land, they had to put the general and elusive notion of national freedom into personal perspective. Each individual had to understand how to utilize the gift of freedom to find his/her individual purpose and his/her individual expression within the context of God's land and God's Torah. Each individual had to find his/her own instrument within the divine symphony orchestra. For this, they required an individual pastor (ro'eh with an ayen and not an aleph). They could not articulate this need because they didn't quite understand it. They thought their discomfort stemmed from boredom with the uniform, daily manna. That's why they were not even sure which food they wanted; meat, watermelon,

leeks or garlic. What they really needed was individual nourishment for their souls. At first, Moses too did not understand what they needed and so, when he sent out the scouts to tour the land and inspire the people with its bounty, he told them "strengthen yourselves and take the fruit of the land" and bring back luscious grapes.

Ultimately, Moses understands this new generation requires a personalized Rebbe rather than a God-imbued Rav. This was a trait which one as close to the Loving Lord of Wisdom and Spirit as Moses was God as Moses, did not have the time or patience to develop. His closeness to God and Eternity conflicted with the immediate individual needs of 600,000 Jews! Moses recognizes that this new generation requires a new leader: "Let the Lord God of the differing spirits of the various flesh and blood human beings appoint a leader over the congregation, one who will take them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the Lord not be like sheep without a shepherd." (Numbers 27:16).

Joshua was a very different type of leader to Moses, a great scholar and prophet, but also a man of the people. This made him the right person to bring this generation into the Promised Land. They had cried out for meat but what they really needed were rabbinic leaders, who would prophesy from within the encampment rather than from the distant Tent of Meeting where God resided. They needed a Rebbe!  
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#### **RABBI BEREL WEIN**

### **Wein Online**

**W**e are familiar with the Rashi's comment in the second verse of this week's Torah reading that the Priest who lit the candelabra was to keep the fire close to the wick, until the wick itself caught fire and rose by itself. This is a lesson not only regarding the lighting of the great candelabra in the Temple but is also a metaphor for many life situations. Unless the wick itself truly catches fire and holds the flame on its own, the effort expended in attempting to light this wick will ultimately be fruitless and unsuccessful.

This metaphor is true in family life as well, for if our children and grandchildren are unable to be successful on their own, then the parents have somehow failed their responsibility regarding their children. This is also true in the realm of education. Students who can never be productive on their own, no matter how much knowledge they have, will not be a source of pride to their teachers.

We have witnessed many times in life that people who were somehow voted to be the most likely from their class to be successful in the future, do not fulfill that hope and expectation. Their flame did not kindle itself and is of limited illumination and value. There are many factors that go into this eternal problem

of generations of students. However, the result is what usually counts, and everyone agrees that success is measured by the ability to eventually achieve by one's own efforts.

This week's Torah reading itself provides an example of this idea, of making certain that the flame will take hold on its own and not flicker and later disappear. We are taught that the Jewish people undertook what should have been a short march from the mountain of Sinai to enter the land of Israel. They are seemingly well mobilized for the journey and embark upon it with apparent enthusiasm. Nevertheless, this journey turns into a trek of 38 years of bitterness, hostility, rebellion, and eventual demise of that entire generation. Simply put, the flame that was with the Jewish people at the Exodus from Egypt and the revelation at Mount Sinai did not hold fast enough to be able to survive the tests and vicissitudes of life and the events that lay ahead.

It would be the task of the later generations to summon the will and tenacity necessary to see to it that the tools necessary for the national growth and development of the Jewish people in the land of Israel would be strong enough to maintain itself on its own. That remains the challenge in Jewish life throughout the long centuries of our existence, and especially over the tumultuous centuries that we have recently experienced. Tenacity of purpose and strength of will have been and remain the key weapons in our arsenal of survival and triumph, and we will see the flame of Israel strengthen and rise once again in our days. ©2021 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI AVI WEISS**

### **Shabbat Forshpeis**

**A**n ish (person) who is tamei la'nefesh (impure because of contact with a dead body) or derech rechokah (too far away from Jerusalem) is given a second chance to eat the paschal lamb (Numbers 9:10-11).

The phrase tamei la'nefesh speaks about a spiritual deficiency – when one has contact with a dead body, emotional and religious turbulence sets in.

The phrase derech rechokah speaks of a physical impediment – being too far away to partake of the paschal lamb on time.

Throughout Jewish history we have faced both spiritual and physical challenges. In the Torah, the spiritual challenge is mentioned first. It is often the case that the Jewish community is more threatened spiritually than physically.

This idea resonates today. Even as anti-Semitism spirals and must be controlled, it is not our key test. With assimilation rampant, it is the soul rather

than the body of American Jewry that is in greater jeopardy.

And in Israel, facing terrorism on all its borders, the IDF must always be on the alert. Still, it is the Jewish dimension of the state – how its mission resonates with its youngsters, how it balances Jewishness with democracy – that is most challenging.

Most interesting is that even the phrase derech rechokah, which, on the surface, is translated as a physical stumbling block, can be understood as a spiritual crisis. On top of the last letter (the heh) of rechokah is a dot. Many commentators understand this mark to denote that, in order to understand this phrase, the heh should be ignored. From the dot, one could imagine a line drawn down, deleting the letter heh. What remains is rachok.

The term rachok, which is masculine, cannot refer to derech, which is feminine. It rather refers to the word ish, found earlier in the sentence (Jerusalem Talmud, Pesachim 9:2). The phrase therefore may refer to Jews who are physically close to Jerusalem yet spiritually far, far away.

The emphasis in these passages on the challenge of spiritual alienation reminds us that while combating anti-Semitism is an important objective, the effort must be part of a far larger goal – the stirring and reawakening of Jewish consciousness. ©2021 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

#### **RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL**

### **One Nation, Under G-d**

**T**he Mishna in Sanhedrin (4:5) teaches that “one who saves the life of another is considered as if they saved an entire world”.

Beyond the accolades given to the rescuer is the understanding that each individual has unique importance and are in fact a “world” unto themselves.

Every person is placed on this earth with something to contribute and the potential to make the world a better place.

The Korbon Pesach (Pesach sacrifice), mentioned in this parsha, is the synthesis of the individual in relation to the community.

On one hand, the Korbon Pesach has the status of a “Korbon Yachid”(private sacrifice), as it is the obligation of an individual to bring their own and are not part of the communal sacrifices, the daily and the special holiday offerings.

On the other hand, the Korbon Pesach enjoys the status of a communal sacrifice in that unlike other private sacrifices, it is offered even on Shabbat and when the community is in a state of impurity.

The commandment to offer the Korbon Pesach coincided with the Exodus from Egypt and the founding

of the Jewish nation. While the collective nation has importance, it is only a nation due to the sum of each of its members.

The Korbon Pesach, our first sacrifice as a nation, therefore combines the individual contribution with the status of a communal sacrifice.

No other private sacrifice has such a status.

The parsha recounts how those people who were unable to offer the Korbon Pesach in its set time came to Moshe for counsel.

HaShem instructed him about the Pesach Sheni, the “second chance” to bring a Korbon for someone who missed the first chance for reasons beyond their control.

Why does the Korbon Pesach, of all sacrifices, merit the second chance?

The message of the individual vis a vis their relationship to the community is so fundamental to God’s plan that He instituted Pesach Sheni.

He values the sacrifices and contributions of each and every person thus affording another opportunity to bring that Korbon.

Imagine if we could emulate that quality to look at the individual, their past experiences and potential, and what they bring to the world. That elderly person on a park bench is a world unto themselves as is the newborn baby asleep in their crib.

Our universe is made up of all those unique “worlds”, each one as important as the next.

Take a moment to consider who they are and what they have or might one day accomplish.

People have faults and make mistakes. That’s part of being human.

The Korbon Pesach and Pesach Sheni is the opportunity to give them and us, that “second chance” by recognizing all that they and we are and can be. ©2021 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema’an Achai lemaanachai.org

## ENCYCLOPEDIA TALMUDIT

# Sounding the Trumpets

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

**B**amidbar 10:9 presents the mitzva of sounding trumpets during wartime (“When you are at war in your land”), and during a time of trouble (“against an enemy who oppresses you”). Some require that both these conditions be present for the mitzva to be in effect. This leads the *Avnei Nezer* to ask whether we should blow the trumpets only for a voluntary war, or also for a *milchemet mitzva* (obligatory war). After all, since G-d has guaranteed us a successful outcome, one might posit that it is not considered a time of trouble. During the war against Jericho (which was a *milchemet mitzva*), they blew the *shofar* and not the trumpets (*Yehoshua* 6:2). This would seem to prove that blowing the trumpets is limited to a voluntary war.

While some limit the trumpet-blowing to a voluntary war, others offer a different limitation. The *Pri Megadim* points out that the verse uses the word “*be-artzechem*” (“in your Land”). He explains that this is the reason that in his time (18<sup>th</sup> century) the trumpet was not blown for trouble, as this was limited to trouble in the Land of Israel (or, by extension, trouble for the majority of the world’s Jews).

With this background, we can understand why Rav Shraga Feivel Frank (*HaMa’ayan*, 1970) exhorted people to blow trumpets near the *Kotel* in contemporary times of trouble. He argued that this would fulfill the mitzva.

In wartime, the trumpets are sounded as part of a special prayer service designed for this purpose. This prayer service is similar to that of *Mussaf* on Rosh Hashanah, with verses of *Malchuyot* (G-d’s kingship), *Zichronot* (asking G-d to remember), and *Shofarot* (about times when a *shofar* was sounded). Some maintain that the trumpets are blown in the battlefield itself, as we see from historical descriptions of the wars of the Maccabees.

Similarly, when our soldiers return from war or when they celebrate victory, they should celebrate and sound the trumpet. This is what King Yehoshaphat did when he returned victorious from the wars against Ammon and Moab. As it states, “For G-d had given them cause for rejoicing over their enemies. They came to Jerusalem to the house of G-d, to the accompaniment of harps, lyres, and trumpets” (*Il Divrei HaYamim* 20:27-28). As a result, “The terror of G-d seized all kingdoms of the land when they heard that G-d had fought the enemies of Israel. The kingdom of Yehoshaphat was untroubled, and his G-d granted him respite on all sides” (*ibid.* 29-30). ©2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

## RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

# Migdal Ohr

**"T**he Children of Israel shall lean their hands on the Levites. And Aharon shall wave the Levites as an elevation offering before Hashem...” (*Bamidbar* 8:10-11) Originally, the first-born of each family was supposed to serve in the Mishkan and the Bais HaMikdash, but, with the sin of the Golden Calf, they lost that opportunity and it passed to the tribe of Levi, in the form of Kohanim and Levi'im.

As part of the Levi'im's preparation, the Torah tells us that the Yisraelim were to lay their hands upon the Levi'im, much as the owner of a korban leans all his weight upon it. Then, they were lifted up by Aharon and waved in all four directions, as well as up and down, symbolizing their service of Hashem Who is master of everything in every direction, and of Heaven and Earth. While some say Aharon elevated them with words, others take it at face value that he physically lifted and waved 22,000 Levi'im that day!

There is an interesting juxtaposition here. First the Jews, or presumably a contingent of the leaders representing the nation, leaned on the Levi'im, pushing down on them. Then, they were lifted up, off of the ground. What is the meaning behind these opposing acts?

The purpose of the Semicha, the leaning, was for the Jews to show the Levi'im that they were depending on them, investing them with all their strength and all their hope that they be good agents on the Jews' behalf. This was a message to the Levi'im about the responsibilities they now bore.

But then, they were lifted, and moved here and there, without their own control. That's because in order to properly serve Hashem and represent Klal Yisrael, one cannot keep his feet planted firmly in one place. Rather, one must be ready to serve Hashem in whatever capacity is warranted and necessary at the moment.

North or South, Up or Down, the place you are in is where you need to act, and you do not get to choose where you will serve Hashem. You only get to choose THAT you will serve Him, and this is what the Tribe of Levi expressed when Moshe cried, "Mi LaShem Alai, Whoever is for Hashem, come to me!" They didn't know precisely what Moshe would ask of them, but they knew they were ready to do whatever it took, and that's why they merited to inherit the role that had previously been ordained for the bechorim.

This is why it was an elevation. When we don't see things through purely physical eyes, but through the spiritual eyes of our minds, we can rise above and free ourselves from the surly bonds of Earth, to touch the face of G-d.

*The Gemara in Taanis (21a) tells the famous story of Nachum Ish Gamzu, a Tanna and teacher of R' Akiva. The Jews wanted to send a gift to the Caesar, and felt the best messenger would be Nachum, who was "well-versed in miracles." They gave him a chest full of jewels and off he went. On the way, he stopped at an inn, where the jewels were stolen and the chest was refilled with soil. Upon seeing this, Nachum didn't get scared or return home. Instead, he said, "Gam Zu L'Tova, Hashem has a good reason for this," and he continued to the palace.*

*When the king opened the box, he exclaimed, "The Jews are making fun of me!" Calmly, Nachum said "Gam Zu L'Tova." Eliyahu HaNavi appeared as a Roman officer and suggested that the earth might be the miraculous earth that Avraham used. Taken to the battlefield, the thrown dirt turned to swords and the straw to arrows. The king rewarded Nachum handsomely.*

*Because Nachum actively believed there was good in all Hashem did, he was able to continuously move forward. Perhaps that's how he was able to accept a 40-year-old ignoramus as a beginner student*

*– and we all know how that story ended.*

*When you see Hashem behind every action, then miracles are perfectly natural. ©2021 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

### **RABBI DAVID LEVIN**

## **Moshe's Father-in-Law**

In Parashat Beha'alotcha we are again introduced to Moshe's Father-in-Law. The Torah mentions many different names for this man and we can only be certain that this is the same person because he is also given the title "Chotein Moshe, the Father-in-Law of Moshe." In this section we are told that the Chotein Moshe was preparing to leave the B'nei Yisrael as they were beginning to journey from Har Sinai into the land that Hashem had promised them. The B'nei Yisrael remained at Har Sinai from just before the giving of the Torah on the sixth day of the third month until the following year in the second month on the twentieth day of the month.

The Torah tells us, "Moshe said to Chovav son of R'ueil, the Midianite, the Father-in-Law of Moshe, we are journeying to the place of which Hashem said I will give it to you, go with us and we shall treat you well, for Hashem has spoken good for Yisrael. And he said to him, I shall not go except to my land and to my birthplace shall I go. He (Moshe) said, please do not forsake us, inasmuch as you know our encampments in the wilderness, and you have been as eyes for us. And it will be that if you come with us then with that goodness with which Hashem will benefit us, we will do good for you."

Yitro was first introduced to us as a Kohein Midian, a priest of Midian, his homeland. Yitro gave Moshe the job of tending his flock of sheep and also gave his daughter, Tzipporah, as a wife. When Moshe went into Egypt years later, he sent Tzipporah with his two sons back to her father for protection. When Moshe freed the B'nei Yisrael and brought them down to Har Sinai, Yitro rejoined Moshe and was impressed enough by the miracles which Hashem had performed for the people that he converted. Yitro had experimented with all of the religions and idol worship of the world but was apparently convinced of the oneness and power of Hashem.

Moshe tells Chovav, "we (na'sa) are journeying" and he encourages Chovav "go (halach) with us". As we have learned earlier, when the language of a sentence changes it is an indication that there is also a difference in the meaning of the two ideas. The Torah could have used the word "nasa" or "halach" in both cases. If the Torah chooses to utilize both words within the same sentence, we must look for a difference in meaning. The Kli Yakar explains that the term "halach, go" indicates that one maintains the place from which he is going in his heart even though he is leaving. The term "nasa, journeying" does not

involve any connection to the past residence. One is leaving with his eyes and his mind focused in a forward direction. We can understand our sentence through this explanation. Rashi and others tell us that there is every indication that the Jews would have entered the land after this first journey of three days. Their sights were centered on their new homeland. They maintained no connection to Egypt, nor to the place in which they had lived for the past year (the desert). They were each promised a portion of land in the new country. There was no such announcement of Hashem's intention to give a portion of land to Yitro or to any other convert.

According to HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch, Yitro misunderstood and believed that Moshe was offering him some form of a handout much as one would give money to the poor. That is not what Moshe intended here. HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin shows that Moshe intended to give Yitro the city of Yericho (Jericho) which fed his children for four hundred and forty years until the building of the Temple, at which time they were settled among the tribe of Binyamin at the site of the Temple Mount. Though they technically lacked the rights of inheritance, they were afforded the right to live near the Temple because of Yitro's assistance to Moshe.

A question which is unanswered by the text itself is whether Yitro acceded to the request from Moshe or whether he returned to his land. Several approaches are taken by the Rabbis. The Ohr HaChaim quotes the Michilta on Yitro concerning the phrase "and Moshe sent out his Father-in-Law." According to Rebbi Yehoshua, Moshe sent Yitro away from Hashem when the B'nei Yisrael began their journey to their land. Rebbi Elazar haModa'i argues that Yitro had every intention of rejoining the B'nei Yisrael but he first wanted to teach his own people the Torah and convert them. The Ohr HaChaim explains that this argument was really based on whether Yitro had actually converted to Judaism. Rebbi Yehoshua believed that he had not converted and therefore he was ineligible to go with the Jewish people into the land. Rebbi Elazar haModa'i makes clear that Yitro did convert and only left the B'nei Yisrael to try to influence his own people.

Rabbi Avraham Gordimer presents an entirely different view of Yitro's dilemma. Yitro wished to continue to serve Hashem, yet he believed that he would not receive any portion in the land. Many laws which were given to the B'nei Yisrael were impossible to observe without owning land. The laws which involved planting crops, harvesting, leaving over for the poor, giving a portion of the harvest to the Levi and the Kohein, the Shemittah year, the first fruits, and more would become the major means of serving Hashem. Since Yitro thought that he would not receive land, he felt that he would not be able to serve Hashem. He

would be excluded from observing Judaism in the same way in which the majority of Jews would serve. For him, the intensity of his observance of Torah would suffer. Yitro understood that Judaism had to be practiced as part of a society and this would be impossible for him in this new situation.

Rabbi Gordimer presents us with our own dilemma. Judaism is a fluid religion; a person should be constantly seeking to raise himself from his own comfort-level of observance. We are a society which seeks personal growth, yet are we always so accepting of people who become more observant? Whether a person moves beyond our own level or someone else wishes to move into our level from a less-observant position, we must welcome this growth. That is not to say that there are not some synagogues which go out of their way to welcome new people and encourage them to be comfortable in their new surroundings. But it is up to all of us to step into this role. May we become a welcoming community of all who wish to grow. © 2021 Rabbi D. Levin

#### **RABBI ZVI SOBOLOFSKY**

### **TorahWeb**

**K**lal Yisrael goes through a significant transformation in Parshas Bahaloscha. Sefer Bamidbar begins on a high note; the Mishkan is complete with Hashem's Presence surrounding His people. Ready to soon enter Eretz Yisrael, it appears that all of the goals of Yetzias Mitzrayim are about to be achieved. At this very moment, though, something goes very drastically wrong. One downfall occurred after another, and Klal Yisroel were then destined to remain in the desert for another forty years. Although the final blow of the sin of the meraglim does not occur until Parshas Shelach, the seeds for this tragedy are planted in this week's parsha.

Complaining about life in the desert began almost immediately after Yetzias Mitzrayim. Lack of food and water had always served as a catalyst for Klal Yisrael to express their frustration with Moshe and to even speak disrespectfully against Hashem. However, in Parshas Bahaloscha, the nature of their bickering takes on a new dimension. The Torah emphasizes the crying of the Jewish People. It is the crying of this week's parsha that foreshadows an even more serious episode that will occur in next week's parsha, when the meraglim return with their negative report about Eretz Yisrael and the response of the Jewish People is to cry uncontrollably. That fateful night of tears was destined to become a night of tears for generations to come. The first Tisha B'av had occurred.

Chazal teach us that even after the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash, we can still reach Hashem through the gates of tears. Requests made while crying are always indicative of a person's genuine desire, and as such are always received by Hashem. However,



because of the great power of tears, one must be exceedingly careful not to abuse them. One who is brought to tears over frivolous concerns shows that the important things in his life are these trivial matters. Crying to Hashem for meat, as occurred in Parshas Bahaloscha, misuses that special vehicle to beseech Hashem for the important things in life. Weeping because of unjustified fear of entering Eretz Yisrael triggers a real need to cry for generations.

There is a very significant role that crying plays in our avodas Hashem, namely the mitzvah of blowing the chatzotzros, the silver trumpets, and the mitzvah of tekias shofar on Rosh Hashanah. In this week's parsha, we are instructed to sound the chatzotzros on the occasion of war or other national crisis. Similarly, the shofar is blown on Rosh Hashanah, which is a time of great uncertainty as our individual and collective lives are on the line. On both occasions we blow the teruah sound, which resembles the sound of weeping. The imagery of these mitzvos is clear. One who truly is in a moment of crisis and genuinely reaches out to Hashem does so by crying. Hashem very much wants our tears; He wants us to cry for the things that really matter. Connecting to Hashem from the depths of our souls as indicated by our cries is the highest form of tefillah. May Hashem help us discern properly what to ask for and what to cry for. May we save our tears for expressing our total dependence on Hashem for His mercy and not belittle our tears by using them for the trivial matters of this world. © 2021 Rabbi Z. Sobolofsky & TorahWeb.org

### AL SHEIM HARAV SHLOMO WOLBE Z"L

## Bais Hamussar

**B**eha'aloscha is the first parsha on the list of parshios that give an account of the "transgressions" committed by Bnei Yisrael in the desert. We read how Bnei Yisrael left Har Sinai like a child running away from school, and how they complained about the mann. The parsha ends with Miriam speaking derogatorily about Moshe Rabbeinu. Parshas Shelach recounts the sin of the meraglim and parshas Korach tells about the fiasco of Korach and his cohorts. Parshas Chukas contains an account of Moshe hitting the rock and parshas Balak concludes with Bnei Yisrael straying after the idols and daughters of Midyan. A superficial reading and understanding of these parshios could lead one to think that this remarkable generation wasn't so lofty after all.

Rav Wolbe writes (Daas Shlomo) that one who wishes to get a true picture of just how great these people were, must bear in mind three points. Firstly, the Kuzari (3:54-63) presents a most important principle. He asserts that the Torah only recounts well known events. The Torah does not tell of the great Torah knowledge of Yehoshua, Shmuel, Shimshon, and Gidoen. Rather it recounts the miracles of the splitting of the Yarden, the sun standing still, and the great

strength of Shimshon. Sefer Shmuel recounts the wars fought by Dovid but it tells us nothing about his great piety, his awesome Torah erudition and his exceptional holiness. Except for a single story regarding the two women who argued over a baby, the Torah does not tell us about the great wisdom of Shlomo. Rather it mentions his fabulous wealth and his lavish meals. The Torah relates the famous stories while the rest of the details are meant to be filled in by Chazal. Learning The Written Torah without the aid of the Oral Torah is like trying to get a picture of someone's life by looking at a few postcards instead of watching an extended video documenting his life.

Secondly, all twenty four books of Tanach are the word of Hashem, just recorded by humans by means of prophecy or ruach hakodesh. Thus, the gauge to measure those mentioned therein cannot be a human yardstick, for these people are being described by Hashem's exacting standards. The greater the person, the more demanding Hashem is in His dealings with them. Minute infractions indiscernible to the human eye are sometimes recorded as severe transgressions.

Lastly, we are literally spiritual light years away from the people discussed in Tanach. The Gemara (Eruvin 53a) in describing the difference between the Tanna'im and Amora'im writes that the hearts of the earlier generations were open like the entranceway to the Ulam (twenty cubits wide) while the hearts of the later generations are open like the eye of a needle! Moreover, Chazal declared "If the earlier generations were like angels then we are like humans; if they were like humans then we are like donkeys!" In other words, the difference between a few generations is compared to the difference between two entirely different species! Similar statements were made by Abaye and Rava who merited visits by Eliyahu Hanavi on a weekly and yearly basis respectively! We must multiply these differences a thousand fold to include the transformation that occurred from the times recorded in Tanach until the Tanna'im, and the many generations from the times of the Amora'im until the present day. We simply do not have the intellectual capability to comprehend the awesome stature of those mentioned in the Torah.

Let us not jump to conclusions regarding the misdeeds mentioned in the Torah. One Chassidic Rebbe pithily summed up this idea when he commented, "I wish my mitzvos were on the level of their aveiros!" Bearing this in mind will give us a fresh approach to the next few weeks of parshios. Instead of condemning their actions, we will be inspired by the immeasurable greatness attainable by man and hopefully be motivated to push ourselves to attain as much of that greatness as we possibly can! © The AishDas Society

